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Thailand: Thai leaders apparently are concerned over what they regard as recent allied setbacks in the Far East.

Bangkok's public reaction to the Viet Cong Tet offensive in South Vietnam has been confined to picturing it as a last desperate gamble which underlines the weakness of the Communist position there. Ambassador Unger reports, however, that the Thai are privately somewhat less sanguine and for the first time have expressed some concern about the ability of US forces to win a military victory in South Vietnam.

Thai reaction to the Pueblo incident has been sharp. Deputy Prime Minister Praphat told a press conference that the seizure of the US ship is the most recent and dramatic example of the fact that the Communists retain the initiative in Asia. In what may have been intended as a reproach to the US handling of the affair, he urged non-Communist countries to take the "offensive" militarily as well as diplomatically.

The military situation in Laos has also been a source of Thai concern, although reaction to the Nam Bac debacle and other recent setbacks has been muted. Thai leaders consider the containment of the Communists in Laos as vital to the national interest, and any Communist gains in the Mekong lowlands are likely to strike an extremely sensitive nerve.

The apprehension in Bangkok has not yet reached the point of new approaches to the US for military aid or a bilateral mutual defense agreement. The Thai leaders would like both, however, and they will not be diffident in pressing their demands if they feel the situation warrants such action.

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Cambodia: Strains between Phnom Penh and the Vietnamese Communists are growing.

In recent weeks Sihanouk has repeatedly attacked North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front for supporting dissident Cambodian Communists and for making "indirect threats" to his regime. He has publicly accused the Vietnamese Communists of arming discontented tribesmen in order to gain control of the sensitive northeastern border area.

Sihanouk has described the increased Vietnamese Communist activity in several eastern provinces and the recent resurgence of "externally directed" armed dissidence in the west as an attempt to pressure Phnom Penh into maintaining an anti-US posture. He warned that such tactics would backfire. Sihanouk characterized Communist activity in Cambodia as part of a greater effort to seize Southeast Asia, a view heretofore confined to private discussions.

Although Sihanouk's attacks are inspired by both real and imagined Communist subversion, they may also reflect his displeasure at the Communists for making excessive use of Cambodian territory to prosecute the war in South Vietnam. According to the French attaché in Phnom Penh, Sihanouk was enraged when he saw the documentation of such Viet Cong activity provided by the US last month and fulminated that he would "chop Communist heads."

Sihanouk, however, is unlikely to push for an open break with the Vietnamese Communists as long as he believes that they will ultimately prevail in South Vietnam.

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Rumania: Rumania intends to send a delegation to the forthcoming meeting of Communist parties with the clear aim of diluting the results.

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[redacted] the decision to attend the meeting, scheduled to open in Budapest on 26 February, will be announced at a party plenum soon. The Rumanian delegation will oppose criticism of any Communist party--whether a participant or not--as well as any effort by the conferees to conclude agreements binding on all participants. The Rumanians will also try to have a world conference of Communist parties put off as long as possible.

Rumanian party officials had extensive talks with representatives from many Communist parties before deciding to attend. [redacted]

The Soviets, Hungarians, and other supporters of the meeting have given repeated assurances that the consultative gathering will not be used to set new guidelines for the movement or to press for conformity. Bucharest remains skeptical, however, and has indicated that it reserves the right to reverse its decision to attend if the ground rules are changed.



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NOTE

Egypt: [redacted]
the USS Georgetown, was overflown three times by
Egyptian IL-28 jet light bombers on 11 February.
Egypt always has been sensitive to foreign ships and
aircraft operating near its borders. Egyptian planes
have flown over US naval ships before, but this is
the first time bombers have done so. The George-
town and its escort, a guided-missile destroyer,
were no closer than 42 nautical miles to the Egyptian
coast during the overflights. [redacted]

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